

- 461 poisoned arrows have fallen into disuse; there was a medicine man in Goni
country named Opyado who used to make and vend the poison. The Kionga
people also had an arrow poison maker. The poison is said to be composed of
281 snake poison and certain herbs. Nearly all of these people wear amulets of a
481 single thickness of skin when travelling.

- 534 Musical instruments.—Their harps have eight strings and are the same as
those of Northern Kavirondo (Figs. 8, 10); the drum is covered with cow hide;
they are called *Fidim*. Their drums are also similar to those of Northern
Kavirondo and are called *Bul* (Fig. 9). The women also make hand harps of
intense stalis called *Obenda*.

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FIG. 8.—HARP: TYPICAL
KAVIRONDI.



FIG. 9.—DANCE OF THE TUNA,
IN THE MOUNTAINS, KAVIRONDI.



FIG. 10.—DRUM: TYPICAL
KAVIRONDI.

- 276 *Fidim and Harp*.—These people smoke and chew tobacco; only a few take
snuff. Both smoke and chew tobacco. Many or Indian harp is smoked
spontaneously in a water pipe. Only men smoke Harp. Young fighting men are
not allowed to smoke it.

- 273 *Fidim or Fume*.—This is made from wine or whisky either singly or
481 mixed. Both serve drink; young women do not drink with the men, the old
222 women however do so.

SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES ON LUO MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

By K. C. Shaw.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

This account of Luo marriage customs was given to me by half a dozen elders of the Luo tribe, living in a location called Nyahera about seven miles from Kisumu. All of them were over fifty, and two at least must have been nearing seventy, if they were not older. The question of the age of my informants may seem irrelevant, but in fact it is not. In the first place their advanced age, as age is counted among primitive people, entailed that they had been brought up, and had passed their early manhood during a period when the customs of the tribe had still not been affected by contact with European civilization. Their view of life, and of their duties as members of the Luo tribe was the view that had been taken by their fathers and their grandfathers before them. In this they differed from their own sons and grandsons whose attitude towards tribal customs has been and continues to be profoundly modified by white influences. This falling away from the traditional ways on the part of the younger generation is not only a source of grief to the old men: it is also a source of profound annoyance. For it robs them of a large part of the prestige and authority which among the Luo, as among other primitive people, is traditionally the due of those who attain to a ripe age. In the old days this prestige and this authority carried great weight. It was the head and fount of power in the tribe, and the exercise and enjoyment of this power became the chief interest of a man's life as his years increased and his sons grew up and took from his shoulders the family duties and cares of his earlier days. It follows that the decay in the importance of the old men, which is such a marked feature in nearly all the Kenya tribes to-day, makes the elders not only resentful, but also very willing to dwell on the old days, the good days, when their word was law, and the young were still in due subjection to the old and the wise. For these two reasons then, their exact personal knowledge of the traditional mode of life of the tribe, and their interest in the days when this mode of life was still the accepted one, the advanced age of my informants was a valuable factor. Also it pleased and flattered them to be appealed to as authorities, and from the beginning to the end of our intercourse they were only too pleased to tell me all they could of the days when they were young. Apart from a natural inclination to view the past through rose spectacles they took great pains to give me an accurate account of what the tribal customs used to be before the white man came. Long discussions used to go on over points of detail, and it was only when they were all agreed that I was allowed

593 ous parents to make his contribution to the family hut tax. The most unruly elements, again speaking generally, are these lads when they return to the Reserves, though some of them come back much benefitted in every way so far as one can tell.

PROVISION FOR THE AGED:

● 888 There is nothing in the social life of the Luo in the way of organized old age relief. The aged look to the younger members of the family to support them. In days gone by when there was no Hut and Poll Tax, and when all the clothing needed was a goatskin, all that the younger members had to provide was food and shelter, with an occasional fee to the medicine man, in the case of illness. Even funerals, when the aged died, were simpler than now. If the parents outlived their offspring there was always the wider circle of the sub-clan or clan to appeal to. And outside the clan were the relations-in-law, upon whom many more claims are made than is customary with us.

[66] But, now, the whole problem of the support of the aged is vastly more difficult, and this in spite of the fact that health measures are beginning to increase the chances of the younger elements surviving to adult life. As against this can be offset the fact that many of the younger members of a family leave the Reserves and remain away for years, and indeed some never are heard of again. Also, there is more than a tendency for the younger generation to go its own way, and commit itself to a more civilized mode of life. There is a definite cleavage between the lives of the younger and the older generations. This is accompanied by weakening ties of common interest and filial duty.

888 Under our regime, and particularly under our system of hut tax, we have driven a wedge into the solidarity of family life which has given a grievous blow to the foundations upon which community life 178 rests. The old are felt to be a burden as never before in the history 651 of the Luo. It is inevitable that more and more burdens should be placed upon the younger elements in tribal life, but we have added to them with, in many cases, a certain element of ruthlessness which is very keenly felt and resented. I quote one instance of what I mean. An old couple in the Reserves with two sons, one a ne'er-do-well a worthless fellow, a jailbird. The other son just rising Poll Tax age. The old couple lived in a rather tumble-down hut, and were known as having no resources, no cattle, sheep or goats. A few fowls formed their "wealth." The old father, while by no means decrepit, was long since past the stage when he could cultivate extensively or go out wage-earning. The old mother had indifferent health, and at times could hardly drag herself back from the well with the pot of

388 water. The young son could not find employment and was wander-
178 ing about trying to scrape together the money for his poll tax. Upon
651 the father came the demand for hut tax. He had no money and could
not pay. Next year another demand was made, this time for the
current year and for that of the previous year. Again he could not
pay. The third year he was dunned for three hut taxes, and as he was
unable to pay his hut was confiscated to Government, the door was
sealed up, and his aged wife driven to seek shelter among neighbours.
Homeless, the old man made a frantic effort amongst his relations,
who were already liable to pay their own dues, and by dint of much
supplication managed to get enough to satisfy the tax for the first of
the three years, whereupon his hut was unsealed. Is it any wonder
that the younger generation regard the aged as a liability as never
before? Demands for hut tax upon the penurious aged is one of
the greatest solvents of filial affection in the Reserves to-day, for
the burden falls largely on the young.

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a criminal offense. He was caught, and the Court fined him a relatively large sum of money and gave him thirty days in which to pay. He became very depressed and, after unsuccessful attempts to raise the money, he hanged himself.

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Suicide Case No. 6.

The man involved was in his early thirties, and was in a position of trust with a Local Government body in Nyanza Province. He was alleged to have abused his position of trust by embezzling a considerable sum of money. The auditors had come across this defalcation in the books and brought it to his attention, but before he was arrested he killed himself by falling on a knife. Both the cause and the method can be said to be modern.

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Case numbers seven and eight involve a loss of status, but on the other hand are attributable to poverty.

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Suicide Case No. 7.

An old man whose wives had all died had to depend on his sons for support. The sons supported the old man while in his village but, after a quarrel, built a new village of their own and refused to build a house for him. As he had no one to support him and as he felt that he was ostracized by his sons, he had, to quote the Luo elders, "No other recourse than to commit suicide. His sons killed him and will suffer." He hanged himself on a thick tree which grew by a river, where he was found by an ex-chief. The Luo elders were quick to point out that he achieved his revenge, because the descendants of his sons were already few in number and mostly girls. "The line will die out because they killed him."

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Suicide Case No. 8.

The man in this case was a widower living with his only son, who gave him food, but could not afford to maintain the ap-

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village straight to the hut which houses the body and to fall prostrate on it, wailing and crying. However, on this occasion, the woman walked very slowly into the village as if in a daze and without crying and without wailing and without saying a word to anyone. She entered her house and locked the door. Those in the village immediately became suspicious and broke the door down but within those five minutes she was found dead from hanging. The villagers told me that she believed the curse of her father had killed the man she loved, so she went to join him.

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[764]*Suicide Case No. 23.*

An elderly woman, whose husband had died, depended on her children for sustenance. In her old age she contracted a disease similar to leprosy. Her son, as is customary on such occasions, destroyed her house in the compound and built one for her outside of the homestead. One morning they found that she had hanged herself because, they stated, of the pain and trouble she experienced through her illness and because she was so unhappy that she could not take her grandchildren to teach and love as was her role in life as a grandmother. Her illness barred her from all of the village activities, and she felt that she was no longer part of the family. Her ghost was not considered to be any more dangerous than that of a person who died a normal death because she was old and her suicide was from old age and weariness. She held no grudge against anyone.

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